

Central Intelligence Agency



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# DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

9 May 1985

#### GORBACHEV'S FOREIGN POLICY

#### Summary

In less than two months, General Secretary Gorbachev has elevated several key supporters to the Politburo, asserted party dominance over the military, and adopted the role of principal foreign policy spokesman for the USSR. Without changing the Kremlin's basic policies and positions, Gorbachev has positioned himself to exploit international interest in a new Soviet leadership and thereby improve bilateral relations with both China and Iran. In statements calculated to affect international opinion, he has portrayed himself as taking the lead in pursuing summitry with the US and has encouraged Europeans to seek a wider debate about the need for US compromises at the Geneva talks. Having gained a propaganda windfall from the accession to power of a younger more vigorous leader, Moscow has signaled an end to the relative immobility of Soviet foreign policy over the past five years, and the authority and durability of Gorbachev's leadership could open the way for more substantive shifts in Soviet policies.

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This memorandum was prepared by Melvin Goodman of the Office of Soviet Analysis. It was coordinated with the Offices of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to Melvin Goodman, Office of Soviet Analysis.

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#### Introduction

There is an appearance of new activism in Soviet foreign policy. part, this impression derives from General Secretary Gorbachev's new leadership in Moscow, which has been portrayed as decisive and formidable. (Soviet propaganda is responsible in no small measure for this image.) In part, it derives from the initiatives and perception of others who are seeking to profit from the change of leadership in Moscow. (Certain West European and Chinese leaders are crediting the Soviets with being more active; some Third World leaders--particularly in Iran and Nicaragua--appear to be anticipating more Soviet support for their interests.) Finally, the impression of activism flows from the actions of the Soviet leadership, which are designed to open the international cul-de-sac created by the walkout from the arms talks with the US in 1983, the cancellation of the Arkhipov visit to Beijing in 1984. and the unwillingness to respond to Iran's overtures for improved relations.

The Soviet leadership already has signaled its intention of increasing pressure on the US to seek accommodation with the USSR, accelerating the pace of improved relations with China, and possibly ending the deterioration in relations with Iran. In order to limit the damage of these initiatives on key clients in the Third World, the Soviets have held a series of meetings with Cuban, Nicaraguan, Vietnamese, and Iraqi leaders to underscore continued support on sensitive regional issues and to stress that "third country" interests would not be compromised. None of these third world states has publicly signaled concern over possible new departures in Soviet relations. The Soviets themselves, moreover, are maintaining an inflexible position toward Pakistan and Japan, which suggests that new power relationships among the top Soviet leaders will not end efforts to intimidate opponents abroad.

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# Gorbachev and Succession Diplomacy

During previous succession periods, Soviet leaders were willing to pursue changes in foreign policy, occasionally adopting policies that relieved foreign pressures until internal positions were sorted out. In the immediate post-Štalin period, for example, the Soviets favored an early end to the Korean War, signed a peace treaty accepting Austrian neutrality, withdrew from Finland, reopened diplomatic relations with Israel, and moved towards summitry with President Eisenhower. In the mid-1960s, the Soviets began both a massive military buildup and a campaign for arms control measures that led to the nonproliferation treaty and SALT I, an expansion of the Soviet position in the Third World, and a policy of selective detente that was designed in part to exploit differences within the Western alliance.

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Two previous successions in the 1980s did not follow this formula, but the current leadership's initial actions toward China and Iran suggest the pursuit of several perceived opportunities. Moscow has diminished its polemics against both Beijing and Tehran, and is trying to project some movement in bilateral relations with China and Iran. Several major Sino-Soviet meetings will take place between now and September, including Vice Premier Yao Yilin's trip to Moscow in June to sign a long-term trade agreement, a Supreme Soviet delegation to Beijing in August, and a meeting at the UN in September between Foreign Ministers Gromyko and Wu. Soviet-Iranian political and economic contacts are scheduled for May and June.

There is no indication that the broad lines of Soviet national security and foreign policy are facing internal challenge, or that Gorbachev is considering any fundamental changes in policies pursued by the Old Guard in the recent past. Moscow is trying to preserve the strategic gains of the 1970s and to extend them where possible. The new leadership appears to realize that the extension of Soviet influence internationally depends in great measure on improvements in the economy at home; Gorbachev's most recent statements seem to emphasize this point, stressing that the "main issue" before the party was economic development. The younger members of the Politburo, and Gorbachev's key allies moreover, are more familiar with economic and domestic issues than with foreign and military problems, and preparations for the next party congress and five-year plan almost certainly will preoccupy the leadership.

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But Gorbachev's decisive victory at the Plenum has breached the generational dividing wall and presumably gives him greater opportunity to change foreign policies as well. Even modest changes in Soviet foreign positions could improve the environment in which difficult domestic decisions are being made--and could have international consequences. Gorbachev's meeting with the Chinese delegation to the Chernenko funeral last month was such an event, signaling a desire to accelerate the pace of improved ties.

### The Sino-Soviet-US Triangle

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Recent Soviet leaders have struggled with the adverse consequences of Moscow's inferior position in the triangular relationship. As a result of the vulnerabilities created by Beijing's rapprochement with the United States, the Soviets have sought to accomplish the following objectives:

- -- secure a breakthrough toward a fundamental improvement in relations with China.
- -- prevent or at least obstruct and delay the drawing together of the US and China.

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-- improve relations with the US, in part to strengthen US incentives to subordinate Washington's relations with Beijing to those with Moscow.

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#### The China Angle

Since Gorbachev's accession to power, the Chinese have been more willing to signal their interest in improving relations or, at the very least, unwilling to appear intransigent in responding to Soviet signs of conciliation. Over the past two months, for example, the Chinese have made fewer references to the "three obstacles" to normalizing relations (Soviet military buildup along the border, occupation of Afghanistan, support for Vietnam), which is not only a signal to Moscow but is potentially worrisome to Japan, Thailand, and the United States. The Chernenko funeral in March became the backdrop for the exchange of political and ideological gestures on the part of both sides, reflecting a mutual interest in lowering the level of confrontation.

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- -- On the eve of the funeral, Gorbachev's speech to the Central Committee stressed the importance of improving relations with China, the only significant foreign policy aspect of a speech devoted to domestic affairs.
- -- Following the funeral services, Gorbachev met with the Chinese delegation, marking the first meeting between a Soviet general secretary and a Chinese official in more than 20 years.
- -- The Chinese delegation, in turn, referred to the USSR as a "socialist" country for the first time in nearly 20 years and referred to Gorbachev as "comrade," which has happened rarely for any Soviet official since the formal break in party ties in 1967. Gorbachev returned the gesture at the Central Committee plenum last month.

Beijing's gestures are far more significant than Moscow's, particularly since they appear to respond to an authoritative Soviet article of late 1984 that chided the Chinese for refusing to identify the USSR as "socialist." China's use of such party terms as "comrade" suggests that it is dangling in front of the Kremlin the possible restoration of party-to-party ties and Chinese attendance at next year's 27th Soviet party congress, which would be a considerable feather in Gorbachev's cap.

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The Soviets, of course, would have to pay a price for any restoration of party ties. There are steps that the Soviets could take which would not have a significant impact on the balance of forces in the region or even alleviate

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Chinese security concerns, but which would have a favorable impact on international perceptions and might start a negotiating process that produced Chinese concessions. Such steps might include:

- The transfer of low-readiness divisions near the Sino-Soviet border or the token redeployment of high-readiness regimental units.
- The announcement of a moratorium on SS-20 deployments in Asia or a freeze on the number of troops on the border.
- -- The return of one or two divisions in Mongolia to the Trans-Baykal Military District.

The latter move would be particularly significant since it would involve a "third country." Moscow has been consistent in stating its refusal to compromise third country interests. The Soviets also could renew such token gestures as confidence-building-measures analogous to the CBMs arranged in the European theater by the Helsinki agreement or such declaratory measures as nonaggression pacts and nonuse of force pledges, although the Chinese have ignored such gestures in the past.

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Until now, the Soviets have been unwilling to discuss Chinese demands for a unilateral Soviet pullback from the "disputed" areas on the border or from Mongolia. Moreover, the sixth round of Sino-Soviet consultations ended last month without any progress on fundamental issues, although Sino-Soviet relations continue to acquire more substance. The two sides for the first time added "politics" to the list of fields for broadening relations and contacts, and China recently offered to establish links between trade unions. The fact that China has been willing to improve state-to-state ties over the past several years without any Soviet concessions on the territorial or geopolitical issues presumably has led Moscow to believe that--even without a significant change in policy--economic, technical, and cultural exchanges can continue to increase, albeit gradually.

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### The US Angle

Gorbachev's intentions toward the US appear no different than those he inherited from his three immediate predecessors--to seek advantage against the US in the military and political spheres while building up a relationship with the United States against a hostile China. The goals that Moscow set in the late 1970s still have not been achieved: a strategic arms agreement that limits US modernization; participation in regional diplomacy, particularly in the Middle East; an expanding Soviet presence in the Third World without undue superpower repercussions; ending trade discrimination; avoiding entanglements on human rights issues. Recently, the US has gained policy flexibility

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against the USSR as a result of Moscow's lack of success in Afghanistan, more active US diplomacy in southern Africa, some signs of stabilization in El Salvador, and the "strategic dialogue" with China.

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As a result, the Soviets have adopted a series of measures designed to create a favorable image of Gorbachev and to put the Reagan administration on the defensive:

- -- Soviet references to summit diplomacy and a European missile moratorium are designed to manipulate public opinion in the US and to exploit West European unease over a perceived lack of US commitment to arms control.
- -- Private Soviet references to long-term economic deals and improved business conditions for US businessmen in Moscow are designed to tantalize prominent US businessmen. Renewed Soviet interest in US petroleum equipment presumably is intended to improve both political and commercial dealings before the US-USSR Joint Commercial Commission meets in May.
- -- The recent Soviet willingness to allow IAEA inspection of a greater variety of Soviet nuclear facilities and Ambassador Dobrynin's private hints that the USSR might accept on-site inspection of the Krasnoyarsk radar installation by a US team are designed to convey a sense of possible "new openess" in the USSR.
- -- An increase in issuance of visas to Jewish refuseniks and the release of a well-known dissident couple have been played as a gesture to the West. Any improvement in conditions for Andrey Sakharov or his wife would have a favorable impact throughout West Europe and the United States.

Following the Soviet announcement of a seven-month moratorium on missile deployments in Europe--timed to coincide with European peace demonstrations on Easter Sunday, the arrival of a US Congressional delegation in Moscow, and talks with the Dutch foreign minister--the Soviets probably will link any ostensible conciliation on INF to the need to restrict SDI. A somewhat more forthcoming position on verification and confidence building measures would also create wedge-driving opportunities between the US and its allies.

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In addition to trying to influence US congressional debate on arms control and military spending, the Soviets will pursue policies that exploit congressional differences with regard to covert action programs on behalf of the contras in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas already have in motion a broad active measures campaign in the US, and the Soviets are pitching in by publicizing President Ortega's willingness to cut the number of Cuban advisers, postpone any acquisition of interceptor aircraft, and cooperate with the Contadora process. All of these steps were announced after an Ortega trip

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to Havana. During President Ortega's talks in Moscow, TASS reiterated the importance of the Contadora process and announced the first withdrawal of Cuban military advisers.

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At the same time, the Soviets are signaling that they remain confident with regard to the overal global power position of the USSR relative to the United States and will not be intimidated by US rhetoric.

- -- Soviet unilateral airspace reservations in the Berlin air corridor are aimed directly at US and Allied interests, and undercut the principle of four-power management in Berlin.
- -- Soviet statements in the aftermath of the Nicholson shooting hold the US entirely responsible and challenge the handling of four-power concerns in the two Germanies.
- -- Soviet intransigence on the substance of the Geneva arms control talks included a veiled threat to repeat the 1983 walkout from START and INF.

All of these steps maintain Moscow's image of strength but, at the same time, contradict and even undercut the efforts of Soviet public diplomacy on arms control and East-West issues that are designed to exploit European doubts about US policies and to create problems for the Reagan administration with the US Congress and public opinion. These inconsistencies may reflect a continuing tension in Moscow between the need to appear firm and any desire to appear forthcoming.

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### The USSR-Iran-Iraq Triangle

Since the Iranian revolution, Moscow has been unable to exploit Iran's anti-US posture and military vulnerability in order to strengthen its own position. Soviet policy tilted toward Iraq in 1982, but the only political benefit that Moscow has received from the war thus far is a closer relationship with Iraq; even that, has failed to deter the reestablishment of US-Iraqi diplomatic ties, Iraq's move toward the moderate Arab states, and Baghdad's interest in diversifying arms purchases, particularly from West European manufacturers.

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Before Gorbachev's accession to power, Soviet-Iranian relations remained severely strained, and Syrian-Libyan efforts to broker improved Soviet-Iranian relations had failed. Last year, the Iranians--facing serious military and economic problems--undertook several initiatives to acquire military and economic support, but Moscow's harsh anti-Iranian line never wavered.

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Gorbachev's immediate predecessors took the long view toward Iran--i.e., recognizing the lack of leverage and strong assets in Iran, they reacted

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As in relations with China, we do not expect the Soviets to make concessions on larger geopolitical issues. Instead, while dissociating themselves from Iraq's bombing tactics against Iranian cities, they are merely holding out the promise of Soviet evenhandedness in relations with Iran and Iraq. There are a number of actions that the Soviets could undertake along this line without overly antagonizing Iraq. They could:

- -- Facilitate the movement of goods across the Soviet-Iranian border.
- -- Return Soviet economic experts to such Iranian economic projects as the power plant at Ahvaz.
- -- Negotiate an increase in trade and economic assistance.
- -- Increase sales of military equipment (small arms, spare parts, ammunition) to Tehran.
- -- Return to restraint with respect to cross-border forays from Afghanistan.

Any of these steps would improve Soviet-Iranian relations, and the Soviets could accomplish this without unduly antagonizing Persian Gulf moderates who are sensitive to any sign of change in Tehran's political isolation in the region. In doing so, the Soviets would be trying to encourage continued antipathy toward the US, Iran's contacts with such radicals as Cuba, Libya, and Syria, and opposition to Israel. Iran is thus far taking the lead in the relationship with the USSR, but the Soviets appear to want to test the waters in order to gauge the level of Tehran's desire for better relations, develop contacts with the Revolutionary Guards, and possibly signal dissatisfaction

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Tikhonov (as the Soviets proposed) and threatened to leave Moscow without meeting any Soviet leader unless Gorbachev received him. The TASS account of the brief session was the sternest of all the descriptions of Gorbachev's meetings with foreign visitors following the Chernenko funeral. At the same time, TASS accounts of Gorbachev's meetings with the leaders of the Japanese communist party were particularly warm in view of the troubled relations that have existed in the past between the CPSU and the JCP. (On the other hand, the Soviets appear to be dangling the possibility of a Gromyko trip to Tokyo later this year in return for greater Japanese flexibility toward the USSR.)

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#### Prospects

The Soviets, having already gained a propaganda windfall from the accession to power of a younger more vigorous leader, are now undertaking a modest but more activist policy designed to improve relations with China and Iran, and steal a march on the United States. In some instances, the Soviets have signaled their interest in creating more moderate public positions. Polemics against China and Iran have diminished somewhat; criticism of support for the Afghan insurgents concentrates on Pakistan, for example, and has been less critical of the efforts of the US, Iran and China. Contacts with Washington, Beijing, and Tehran are increasing or being sought with Soviets baiting the discussion with hints of increased trade opportunities, including long-term arrangements with the US and China, and more high-level discussion.\*

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Gorbachev's public remarks seem intended to assure the party that Soviet interests will be protected and to intensify Western pressure on US policies.

- -- Gorbachev was critical of the US in his plenum address on 23 April and the V-E Day speech but his statement to a West German peace group in March, Prayda interview in April, and Elbe anniversary reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to East-West relations. His plenum address defended the Soviet rationale for a continued dialogue with Washington, and his statement to the Warsaw Pact leadership last week was a moderate one pitched to a West European audience. His V-E speech also called for a revival of detente.
- -- Gorbachev used his meetings with West European leaders last month to stress improved relations with the most notable change being reduced
- \* The Soviets were particularly careful in their talks with Vice Premier Li Peng, who is reportedly being groomed to become Premier Zhao Ziyang's executive officer and may be promoted to both the secretariat and the politburo in the fall. Li studied in the USSR in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and has a good command of Russian.

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stress improved relations with the most notable change being reduced criticism of West Germany.

As a result of these efforts, Gorbachev has created an impression he is taking the lead on summitry with the US and has encouraged Europeans to seek a wider debate about the need for US compromises at the Geneva arms control talks, particularly on SDI. Recent Chinese actions suggest that Beijing is prepared to move ahead with state-to-state relations and to probe for signs of Soviet flexibility.

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There are ripple effects associated with Soviet gestures that also could redound to Moscow's advantage. Soviet contacts with Iran could provide Moscow with more leverage over both Iran and Iraq. The Soviets presumably realize that even the appearance of better relations with the US could lead to improved Soviet economic relations with Japan and greater anxiety in Pakistan. Continued normalization with China opens up opportunities with ASEAN states and allows the Soviets to maneuver diplomatically in Southeast Asia vis-a-vis the US. Progress on either of these fronts could lead to greater tolerance for Soviet activity in the Third World.

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Moscow eventually will have to consider changes in more than style and atmospherics, however, in order to obtain genuine improvement in relations with the US, West Europe, China, and Iran. One way to strengthen leverage with Washington would be to improve relations with China, perhaps by taking a symbolic unilateral reduction of Soviet forces along the border or in Mongolia. Similarly, the missile moratorium in Europe could be followed by an announcement of unilateral reductions in Soviet medium-range missiles or a freeze on the forces of all participants in the MBFR talks until a final agreement is reached. Such steps would require a Soviet leadership capable of imposing unpalatable policies on the military leadership.

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Thus far, Gorbachev has had great success in elevating his supporters to positions of authority and asserting party dominance over the military. And he has adopted a more assertive and self-confident stance in foreign policy. The struggle over resource allocations and foreign and defense policies are continuing, however, and it will remain difficult to alter the substance of Moscow's key bilateral relationships. Nevertheless, the relative immobilism of the last five years of Soviet foreign policy appears to have ended, and the authority and durability of Gorbachev's leadership could open the way for more substantive shifts in Soviet foreign policy.

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